



## ***Woodrow Wilson as Governor of New Jersey***

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**Central issue, problem, or question:** How was Woodrow Wilson's presidency of Princeton University and governorship of New Jersey a dress rehearsal for his presidency of the United States?

**Significance:** This lesson shows how examining Woodrow Wilson's experiences in New Jersey helps students understand his later actions as president of the United States.

**New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Social Studies:**  
**Standard 6.4** (United States and New Jersey History). **High School: I-2**  
(Discuss the rise of the Progressive Movement).

**Objectives:** After learning about Woodrow Wilson's governorship and reading and analyzing primary source documents, students will be able to:

- Describe Woodrow Wilson's campaign for governor of New Jersey.
- Explain how Wilson attempted to reform New Jersey's economy and politics.
- Assess the extent to which Wilson's term as governor was a dress rehearsal for his presidency.

**Abstract:** After reading and analyzing primary source documents, middle school students will describe Woodrow Wilson's reform goals and gubernatorial campaign. High schools students will report to the class on Governor Wilson's reform priorities and assess the extent to which Wilson's term as governor was a dress rehearsal for his presidency.

**Duration:** Two 45-minute class periods.

## Sources

### Secondary Sources

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John Milton Cooper online lecture: "Woodrow Wilson: New Jersey's Most Famous Governor," July 11, 1005, available in the "Woodrow Wilson" section of the New Jersey History Partnership Project website, <http://nj-history.org>.

Arthur S. Link, *Wilson, The Road to the White House* (Princeton, 1947).

John Morton Blum, *Woodrow Wilson and the Politics of Morality* (Boston, 1956).

"The Progressive Banner," program 9, *New Jersey Legacy* television series, co-produced by the New Jersey Historical Commission and New Jersey Public Television and Radio, 2003, videocassette and DVD.

### Primary Sources

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An Interview with Woodrow Wilson, *New York Times*, 30 October 1910. <http://nj-history.org/proRef/wilson/pdf/wilsonDoc1.pdf>

A "Unique" Campaign Reception, *Newark Evening News*, 20 October 1910. <http://nj-history.org/proRef/wilson/pdf/wilsonDoc2.pdf>

Joseph Tumulty on Woodrow Wilson's Response to George Record, 1921. <http://nj-history.org/proRef/wilson/pdf/wilsonDoc3.pdf>

Woodrow Wilson's Inaugural Address as Governor of New Jersey, 17 January 1911. <http://nj-history.org/proRef/wilson/pdf/wilsonDoc4.pdf>

**Materials:** Teachers will need copies of primary source documents and worksheets.

**Background:** The Progressive Era has been described by some historians as a hostile reaction of the traditional middle class to the overwhelming power of big business at the end of the nineteenth century. It marked a period of reform initiated by highly educated intellectuals, often guided by a strong sense of religious piety and moralistic duty. It is from this tradition that Woodrow Wilson emerged, as governor of New Jersey and later president of the United States. In his gubernatorial inaugural address of 1911, Wilson identified many of the reform priorities of the Progressive Era; these included reorganizing the economy, regulating corporations, combating political corruption, and conserving natural resources.

With a keen sense of virtue, deeply rooted in the old traditional Protestantism of the South, Woodrow Wilson claimed the great responsibility of keeping, defending, and promoting a traditional vision of American virtues. When reading Wilson's political writings, students should keep in mind that progressive reformers were not motivated simply by disinterested charity. Rather, they sought to improve class relations and combat radicalism by controlling big business, improving working conditions, and "Americanizing" immigrants.

Although he campaigned as a reformer in 1910, Wilson had the support of Democratic bosses James Smith and his nephew James Nugent. This support made reform-minded "New Idea" Republicans, such as George Record, suspect Wilson's reform credentials. However, Wilson managed to reassure reformers that he was not beholden to Democratic bosses, and once elected, Wilson was true to his word, refusing to support Boss Smith's bid to become a United States Senator. As governor, Wilson led the state legislature to adopt numerous reforms dear to the Progressive movement, including electoral reform acts, a workmen's compensation law, and the establishment of a public service commission to regulate transportation and public utilities. Wilson's successes as reform governor of New Jersey made him an attractive presidential candidate in 1912.

**Key Words:**

Progressivism

Political Boss

Machine Politics

Graft

"New Idea" Republicans

Workmen's Compensation

Public Utilities

Municipal Reform

## **Middle School Procedures**

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For homework the night before this lesson, students should read the section of their textbook on machine politics and progressive reformers. The teacher should begin the lesson by asking students to define key terms: progressivism, political boss, machine politics, and graft. Then the teacher should introduce the class to Woodrow Wilson by showing a video segment on his career in New Jersey from the *New Jersey Legacy* television series, available in the "Woodrow Wilson" section of the New Jersey History Partnership Project website, <http://nj-history.org>.

Afterwards, the teacher should distribute copies of an interview with Woodrow Wilson. <http://nj-history.org/proRef/wilson/pdf/wilsonDoc1.pdf>

For homework that night students will read the document and fill out the worksheet. <http://nj-history.org/proRef/wilson/pdf/wilsonWSMS.pdf>

On the following day, the teacher should review the homework by discussing students' answers to the worksheet questions. Next the teacher should hand out a second document, A Unique Campaign Reception.

<http://nj-history.org/proRef/wilson/pdf/wilsonDoc2.pdf>

The teacher should call on students to read portions of the document aloud, stopping where necessary to define difficult terms, and then lead a discussion of the document focusing on the following questions:

- Why do you think this reception was described as “unique”?
- With whom did Wilson meet before the reception? Who was he? What was the significance of the meeting?
- How were the workingmen described? What was the tone of this description?
- What role did women play at the reception? Do you think that these women would have had much influence on Wilson's policies?

The teacher should conclude the lesson by asking the class to think of five statements that describe Woodrow Wilson's campaign to become governor of New Jersey.

## High School Procedures

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For homework the night before this lesson, students should read the section of their textbooks on Woodrow Wilson's domestic policies as president of the United States. The teacher should begin the lesson with a short lecture (based on John Milton Cooper's online lecture, available in the “Woodrow Wilson” section of the New Jersey History Partnership Project website, <http://nj-history.org>) about Woodrow Wilson as governor of New Jersey. Alternately, the teacher might show a video segment on Woodrow Wilson's career in New Jersey from the *New Jersey Legacy* television series, available in the “Woodrow Wilson” section of the New Jersey History Partnership Project website, <http://nj-history.org>.

Then the teacher should distribute a primary source document, Joseph Tumulty on Wilson's Response to George Record.

<http://nj-history.org/proRef/wilson/pdf/wilsonDoc3.pdf>

The teacher should explain that Joseph Tumulty was a Jersey City politician who became a close advisor to Woodrow Wilson, both as governor of New Jersey and president of the United States. George Record was a progressive, or “New Idea,” Republican and a critic of machine politics. For homework students should read the document and answer worksheet questions.

<http://nj-history.org/proRef/wilson/pdf/wilsonWSHS.pdf>

The next day in class, the teacher should review students' answers to the worksheet questions. Afterwards, the teacher should hand out copies of Wilson's 1911 inaugural address.

<http://nj-history.org/proRef/wilson/pdf/wilsonDoc4.pdf>

The teacher should assign students to cooperative groups. Each group will be responsible for reading and analyzing the document and for reporting to the class on one of the four reform priorities identified by Wilson: protecting workers, regulating corporations, ensuring fair elections, and conserving natural resources. Each group should explain the problem(s) Wilson identified and his solution(s); they should also research and report on similar reforms or reform proposals at the national level (based on what they learn from their textbooks or from online or library research).

Finally, the teacher should assign students to write a short essay on the question: To what extent did Woodrow Wilson's acts as governor of New Jersey anticipate his domestic policies as president of the United States?

**Comments and Suggestions:** Teachers might ask students to assess the extent to which Progressive Era concerns (about water quality, for example) continue to attract political attention today.

**Connections:** In combination with the New Jersey History Partnership Project lesson on "Muckrakers and New Jersey Politics," this lesson might be part of a larger unit on Progressive Era political reforms.

<http://nj-history.org/proRef/muckrakers/pdf/muckrakersLesson.pdf>